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WASHINGTON POST
23 February 1986

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Iraq Pulls Troops From Basra Front

Army Corps Sent South in Attempt to Retake Port of Faw

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BAGHDAD, Iraq, Feb. 22—Iraq has moved fresh troops, equipment and a top battlefield commander from a vital front north of Basra to bolster its drive south of the city against Iranian troops entrenched on the marshy Faw peninsula.

Iraq has been trying to dislodge Iranian forces now estimated at 30,000 men from the Persian Gulf oil terminal port since its capture 13 days ago.

Lt. Gen. Maher Ahmed Rashid told a press conference in Basra today that his 3rd Army Corps was being sent south to join three columns of Iraq's 7th Army Corps trying to push back the Iranians.

Rashid predicted his men would turn the tide of the battle and "soon have the Iraqi flag flying over Faw."

[In Tehran, Reuter reported that officials issued a communique saying the Iranian occupiers had crushed four Iraqi infantry attacks.

[Tehran radio said the attacks caused 1,000 Iraqi casualties and resulted in the capture of 87 Iraqis, bringing to 2,192 the number taken during Iran's "Dawn 8" offensive.

[Iran now holds 360 square miles of the "strategic region," the communique said.

[Iran said it shot down five planes today, bringing the total to 55. Iraq has conceded the loss of six aircraft.]

Western diplomatic and military observers here said Rashid's fresh forces were reinforcing the 7th Army's northern column, which has been bogged down for a week along the main Basra-Faw road paralleling the Shatt al Arab waterway that divides the warring nations.

The Iraqi counteroffensive against the Iranians in Faw is being led by a respected assistant military chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Hisham Sabahn Fakhri, and is spearheaded by elite commando units and republican guards from Baghdad.

According to western sources monitoring the battle from Bagh-

dad, the counteroffensive has had some success in pushing the Iranians back along the road connecting Faw to the Iraqi naval base at Umm Qasr. A central column moving down a rough new gravel road has also made slight advances, according to an Iraqi military communique issued tonight.

Travelers returning from the battlefield area today reported that Iraq had been laying down a curtain of artillery fire and aerial bombardment ahead of its troops in conformity with its strategy of trying to minimize casualties on the ground by relying on its superior firepower over the Iranians in artillery, tanks and aircraft.

The Iranians, however, are reported to be well dug in around Faw and in recent nights have managed to reinforce their forces with tanks and artillery ferried across the fast-flowing Shatt al Arab.

The peninsula's marshy salt flats and palm groves have seriously hampered Iraq's ability to use its superior tank force. Military ob-

servers here feel the terrain remains favorable to the Iranian occupiers because of their greater reliance on infantry troops.

More worrying to many diplomats and military observers here is the effect that the diversion of Gen. Rashid and many of his troops might have on the Howeizah marshes front just east of the strategic Basra-to-Baghdad highway he normally defends.

According to sources with access to aerial satellite photos of the Iran-Iraqi fronts, a large force of Iranian troops has been massing behind the Howeizah marshes for the past month and another offensive in this zone, fought over bitterly in the past two years, is a dangerous possibility given the new diversions of Iraqi forces.

The fierceness of the fighting around Faw and the slowness of the Iraqi advance was confirmed tonight by an Iraqi military communique lauding the counteroffensive, but admitting that its central column had advanced only three kilometers during the past 24 hours and the southern column only 1.5 kilometers. The communique admitted also that the northern column had not moved at all but was "pounding" the enemy with artillery.